

CHAPTER 13

Al-Ra'd: The Thunder

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 6 *sections*; 43 *verses*)

This chapter is named *The Thunder* from the analogy of the rain, which is often likened to revelation in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân. As the rain is a mercy from Allâh, so is revelation, yet as rain is accompanied by thunder and lightning, so revelation is accompanied by warning of punishment, though its real object is to confer benefit.

It deals with the truth of revelation and a reference to previous history in the chapter preceding the last is here followed by a discussion as to the fate of the opponents of the Holy Prophet. It opens with an assertion as to the truth of Divine revelation, and points to the numerous signs in physical nature, which bear witness to its truth. But not satisfied with these signs, the disbelievers demand that the punishment with which they were threatened as being their ultimate fate should overtake them. The second section is a reply to this demand. There is a law according to which nations rise and fall, and the fall of idolaters, and the rise of the Muslim nation, was to be brought about in accordance with that law. Here it is that the warning is compared to thunder, revelation being rain, the suggestion being that a demand for punishment is as foolish as a desire to be struck by lightning instead of benefiting by the rain. In the third section the disbelievers are told that there is no showing of partiality for one or hatred for another in Divine nature, but that it is in accordance with Divine laws that righteousness brings its own reward, while continued transgression is followed by evil consequences. And why should they again and again demand a miracle from without? The real miracles, we are told in the fourth section, are the miracles, which work within humans. The satisfaction which the Holy Book brings to the hearts of the true believers is the great transformation, which it was to bring about in the world. And the moving away of the great mountains which were obstacles to the spread of truth, and the quickening of those who were dead in reality, were the real miracles which a

heavenly book should work among men. This is what the Qur'ân was destined to do, and what it had already effected to a remarkable extent. Opposition, we are told in the fifth section, were destined to fail because truth must spread in the world and prevail over falsehood. The closing section brings in evidence of the progress of truth, which, however slow, was certainly steady. This chapter, like the three sister chapters preceding it and the two that follow it, was revealed at Makkah in the last Makkan period.

SECTION 1: **Truth of Revelation**

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 *Alif lâm mîm râ* These are verses of the Book. And that which is revealed to you from your *Rabb* is the Truth, but most people believe not.

2 Allâh is He Who raised the *samâwât* without any pillars that you can see, and He is established on the Throne of Power,^a and He made the sun and the moon of service (to you). Each one runs to an appointed term. He regulates the affair, making clear the messages that you may be certain of the meeting with your *Rabb*.

3 And He it is Who spread the earth, and made in it firm mountains and rivers. And of all fruits He has made in it pairs two (of every kind). He makes the night cover the day. Surely there are signs in this for a people who reflect.

4 And in the earth are tracts side by side, and gardens of vines, and corn, and palm-trees growing from one root and distinct roots — they are watered with one water; and We make some of them to excel others in fruit. Surely there are signs in this for a people who understand.^a

2a. All celestial bodies are raised high without any pillars that humans can see. Those pillars are the laws of gravitation. All celestial bodies, we are further told, run their course to an appointed term; they have a beginning and an end, as all things on earth have a beginning and an end.

5 And if you wonder, then wondrous is they're saying: When we are dust, shall we then be raised in a new creation? These are they who disbelieve in their *Rabb*, and these have chains on their necks, and they are the companions of the Fire; in it they will abide.^a

6 And they ask you to hasten on the evil before the good, and indeed there have been exemplary punishments^a before them. And surely your *Rabb* is full of forgiveness for mankind notwithstanding their iniquity.^b And surely your *Rabb* is Severe in requiting.

7 And those who disbelieve say: Why has not a sign been sent down to him from his *Rabb*? You are only a warner and for every people a guide.^a

SECTION 2: **Fall and Rise of Nations**

8 Allâh knows what every female bear, and that of which the wombs fall short of completion and that which they grow.^a And everything with Him has a measure.

4a. Unity in diversity is observable in the whole of nature, which is a sure sign of the Unity of the great Author of all existence. Besides this, as there is a difference in the produce of different tracts, though they are subject to the same laws of nature, even so are the hearts of men in relation to the growth of the seed of virtue, which is sown by revelation.

5a. The chains spoken of here are the chains, which keep them constrained to evil usage and corrupt practices.

6a. *Mathulât* is the plural of *muthlah*, which means *a punishment that comes down upon human beings so that he (or she) is made an example by which another is restrained* (R).

6b. The Makkans were warned again and again, and they demanded that the threatened punishment should overtake them, but they are told that the Merciful Allâh would deal with them not according to their iniquities, but according to His vast and comprehensive forgiveness. But when evil out-steps all bounds, His very mercy, which must be exercised towards His righteous servants, requires that the

iniquitous should not be left without punishment. Hence our *Rabb* is also severe in requiting evil.

7a. The words *for every people a guide* refers to the Holy Prophet. He was a warner indeed; he warned the evildoers of the evil consequences of their evil deeds, but he was ultimately to be a guide for every people, to lead them out of their evil ways and to set them on the right path.

9 The Knower of the unseen and the seen, the Great, the Most High.

10 Alike (to Him) among you is he who conceals (the) word and he who speaks openly, and he who hides himself by night and (who) goes forth by day.^a

11 For him are (*malâ'ikah*) guarding the consequences (of his deeds), before him and behind him, who guard him by Allâh's command.^a Surely Allâh changes not the condition of a people, until they change their own condition. And when Allâh intends evil to a people, there is no averting it, and besides Him they have no protector.

12 He it is Who shows you the lightning causing fear and hope and (Who) brings up the heavy cloud.

13 And the thunder celebrates His praise, and the *malâ'ikah* too for awe of Him. And He sends the thunderbolts and smites with them whom He pleases, yet they dispute concerning Allâh, and He is Mighty in prowess.

8a. The wombs fall short of completion when no gestation takes place. The physical law of nature is spoken of here with a deeper reference to the religious law, according to which some receive a new birth through the Prophet and others do not. The subject is made clearer in the verses that follow.

10a. A general law is given expression to with a deeper reference to the secret and open counsels against the Prophet and to enemies seeking his life by day and by night. A perusal of the history of his life shows that those who sought his life sometimes followed him secretly, when he went out to pray during the early hours of the morning, and sometimes openly followed him in the daytime with an evil purpose.

11a. While the statement is no doubt general and refers to the guardian *malâ'ikah* referred to in 6:61, there is a deeper allusion to the Divine protection specially vouchsafed to the Holy Prophet against the numerous enemies among whom he lived day and night. *Mu'aqqibât* (sing. *mu'aqqib*) is derived from *'aqqaba*, meaning *he looked to the consequence, or result of the affair* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The word may also be translated as meaning *those following one another*. Such are the *malâ'ikah*, who are mentioned as *hafazah* or *keepers* in 6:61, and as *kirâm-an kâtibîn* or honourable recorders in 82:11, 12. They guard the consequences of the deeds of man, and are therefore spoken of here as *guarding him*, i.e., *guarding whatever he does*, by Allâh's command.

14 To Him is due the true prayer. And those to whom they pray besides Him give them no answer, but (they are) like one who stretches forth his two hands towards water that it may reach his mouth, but it will not reach it. And the prayer of the disbelievers is only wasted.

15 And whoever is in the *samâwât* and the earth makes obeisance to Allâh only, willingly and unwillingly, and their shadows, too, at morn and eve.^a

Prostration

16 Say: Who is the *Rabb* of the *samâwât* and the earth? Say, 'Allâh. Say: Do you then take besides Him, guardians who control no benefit or harm even for themselves? Say, 'Are the blind and the seeing alike? Or, are darkness and light equal? Or, have they set up with Allâh associates who have created creation like His, so that what is created became confused to them? Say, 'Allâh is the Creator of all things, and He is the One, the Supreme.

17 He sends down water from the clouds, then watercourse (to) flow according to their measure, and the torrent bears along the swelling foam. And from that which they melt in the fire for the sake of making ornaments or apparatus^a arises a scum like it. Thus does Allâh compare truth and falsehood. Then as for the scum, it passes away as a worthless thing; and as for that which does good to men, it tarries in the earth. Thus does Allâh set forth parables.^b

15a. The recital of this verse is followed by actual prostration; see 7:206a.

18 For those who respond to their *Rabb* is good. And as for those who respond not to Him, even if they had all that is in the earth and, the like thereof with it, they would certainly offer it for a ransom. As for those, theirs is an evil reckoning and their abode is hell; and evil is the resting-place.

SECTION 3: **Good and Evil bring their own Reward**

19 Is he who knows that what is revealed to you from your *Rabb* is the truth like him who is blind? Only people of understanding mind —

20 Those who fulfil the pact of Allâh, and break not the covenant,

21 And those who join that which Allâh has bidden to be joined^a and have awe of their *Rabb*, and fear the evil reckoning.

22 And those who are steadfast ^a seeking the pleasure of their *Rabb*, and keep up prayer and spend of that which We have given them, secretly and openly, and repel evil with good;^b for such is the (happy) issue of the abode —

17a. *Matâ‘* includes here *all kinds of things necessary for the life of humans*, such as *utensils, tools, implements, and instruments of war* (*Al-Sihâh Tâj al-Lughah wa Sihâh al-‘Arabiyyah* (Dictionary) by Ismâ’îl ibn Hammâd al-Jawharî).

17b. The parable set forth here signifies that the Holy Prophet and his followers will live and prosper, as they work for the good of human beings. On the other hand, evil practices and worthless usage and customs, as well as those who uphold them, will be swept away before the mighty current of Truth, as rubbish is borne away by a torrent.

21a. While the previous verse deals with human being’s duty to their Maker, this treats of the relations with His creatures. “What Allâh has bidden to be joined” includes all those ties of love and relationship, which Allâh has taught human beings to observe and keep inviolate.

23 Gardens of perpetuity, which they will enter along with those who do good from among their fathers and their spouses *a* and their offspring; and the *malâ'ikah* will enter in upon them from every gate.

24 Peace be to you, because you were constant — how excellent is then the final Abode!

25 And those who break the covenant of Allâh after its confirmation, and cut asunder that which Allâh has ordered to be joined, and make mischief in the land, for them is the curse, and theirs is the evil end of the Abode.

26 Allâh amplifies and straitens provision for whom He pleases. And they rejoice in this world's life. And this world's life, compared with the Hereafter, is only a temporary enjoyment.

SECTION 4: Revolution to be brought about by Qur'ân

27 And those who disbelieve say: Why is not a sign sent down to him by his *Rabb?*^a Say: Allâh leaves in error whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him) ^b —

22a. Patience in trials and sufferings is only one of the ideas, which the word *sabr* conveys. According to *Al-Mufradât fî Gharrîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l-Qâsim Al-Husain *al-Râghib* al-Isfahânî, *sabr* is *the keeping oneself constrained to that which reason or law requires, or the withholding from that from which it requires to withhold*.

22b. *Evil* is a thing, which is by all means to be repelled and hence *good for evil* is recommended only in cases when *evil* would be *repelled* by that good. Unconditionally requiting evil with good would abolish all safeguards; evildoers who received nothing but good for every evil they committed would most assuredly establish a condition of anarchy by their evil deeds. Elsewhere it is said: *whoever forgives and amends* (42:40).

28 Those who believe and whose hearts find rest in the remembrance of Allâh. Now surely in Allâh's remembrance do hearts find rest.

29 Those who believe and do good, a good final state is theirs and a goodly return.^a

30 Thus We have sent you among a nation before which other nations have passed away, that you might recite to them what We have revealed to you, and (still) they deny the Beneficent. Say, ‘He is my *Rabb*, there is no deity but He; in Him do I trust and to Him is my return.

31 And if there could be a Qur’ân with which the mountains were made to pass away, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak^a— nay, the commandment is wholly Allâh’s. Do not those who believe know that, if Allâh please, He would certainly guide all the people? And as for those who disbelieve, disaster will not cease to afflict them because of what they do, or it will alight close by their abodes, until the promise of Allâh come to pass. Surely Allâh will not fail in (His) promise.

23a. The Qur’ân is full of clear statements that women shall enjoy the bliss of paradise. *Azwâj* is the plural of *zauj*, which means either husband or wife, and hence I have rendered it as spouses or mates.

27a. The answer to this question is given in the concluding words of the section: “disaster will not cease to afflict them because of what they do, or it will alight close by their abodes, until the promise of Allâh come to pass”. This promise related to the utter annihilation of the power of the disbelievers. The question *why is not a sign sent down to him?* Here as elsewhere in the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân, is really a demand for the promised annihilation of their power and their vanquishment. And the answer is always conveyed in somewhat similar terms, stating first that they should ask for mercy. And that the Qur’ân has healing power, the condition of the faithful being a witness to it. Also that the fate of the former generations affords a lesson; that smaller calamities continue to afflict them, and in these they can see the signs of their ultimate vanquishment; and that finally, if all those tokens are rejected, the great calamity will not fail to overtake them.

27b. The contrast with *those who turn to Allâh* makes it clear that Allâh’s pleasure to leave some in error is exercised only in the case of those who, though invited to

Allâh, do not turn to Him but choose to remain in error. The first part may also be translated thus: *Allâh leaves in error who will (remain in error)*.

29a. *Tûbâ*, as an infinitive noun (from *tâba*, meaning *it became good*), means a *good final state* or *good future* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

SECTION 5: **Opposition will fail**

32 And messengers before thee were certainly mocked, but I gave respite to those who disbelieved, then I seized them. How (awful) was then My requital!

33 Is, then, He Who watches every soul as to what it earns —? *a* And yet they ascribe partners to Allâh! Say, ‘Name them. *b* Would you inform Him of that which He knows not in the earth, or of an outward saying? *c* Rather, their plan is made fair seeming to those who disbelieve, *d* and they are kept back from the path. And whom Allâh leaves in error, he has no guide.

31a. According to some, the words *la-kâna hâdhâ-l-Qur’ân* are understood, i.e. *it is this Qur’ân* (*Jâmi‘ al-Bayân fî Tafsîr al-Qur’ân* (Commentary), by Al-Shaikh Mu‘în al-Dîn ibn Safî al-Dîn). But the answer is contained in what follows and there is no omission here. That the Qur’ân should work great wonders is not here treated as an impossibility, but rather as a fact, for we are immediately told that *the commandment is wholly Allâh’s*, which is equivalent to saying that it will be brought about soon by His commandment. At the time when these verses were revealed, difficulties in the spread of Islâm appeared like mountains. Formidable opponents of the Prophet stood undoubtedly like impassable mountains — and they were given the name of *jibâl*, or *mountains*, by the Arabs (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane) — in the way of the advance of Truth. That they were made to pass away is a matter of history. The words *qutti‘at bi-hi-l-arḍu* may mean *the earth were cloven asunder*, by which is to be understood that the Qur’ân would go deep down into the hearts of human beings, which are compared here to the earth, which would thus be cloven asunder, with streams and springs flowing in it. Another significance of the words is that the earth will be *travelled*

over. There were no facilities at that time for going to distant corners of Arabia, to say nothing of the distant countries of the world. Yet so irresistible was the urge within the hearts of Muslims to deliver the message of Truth that not only was the whole of Arabia travelled over by the message-bearers of Islâm within ten years after this in the Prophet's lifetime. But within a hundred years after the Prophet, Islâm had traversed the whole of the known world, spreading from the farthest East in China to the farthest West in Spain. As regards the last statement, *the dead were made to speak*; it is again a matter of history. Human beings who were dead devotionally now spoke with such power that the whole earth from end to end responded to their call. See 6:122, where the dead in the terminology of the Qur'ân is made clear, and are sometimes meant the devotionally *dead* and by *giving life* is meant their devotional *quickenings*.

34 For them is chastisement in this world's life, and the chastisement of the Hereafter is certainly more grievous. And they have no protector against Allâh.

35 A parable of the Garden, which is promised to those who keep their duty: *a* Therein flow rivers. Its fruits are perpetual and its plenty. *b* Such is the end for those who keep their duty; and the end for the disbelievers is the Fire.

33a. Allâh watches what everyone does, i.e. requites everyone for what he does — their alleged associate-gods are admittedly unable to do this. The answer to the question, Is He...? Is given in the words that follow; *yet they ascribe partners to Allâh*.

33b. It is to show the utmost contempt for the alleged associates of the Divine Being that their worshippers are called upon to give them a name, as if it were said that they are not worthy of a name. Or the meaning may be, give them a name expressing any qualification of godhead, such as a sustainer, creator, etc.

33c. The appeal is to the inner self of humans. Is anything hidden from Allâh? Is He not Aware of the inmost feelings of human beings? Must there be a partner with Allâh, who should tell Him of what He knows not? Are your outward sayings, not known to Him, so that there must be a partner to inform Him of what

you say? He knows both the inner feelings of human beings and his or her outward sayings, and He does not stand in need of a mediator.

33d. It is the *shaitân* who makes the evil deeds fair seeming to human beings; see 6:43, 16:63. And elsewhere it is made clear: “And the *shaitân* made their deeds fair-seeming to them, so he kept them back from the path” (29:38).

35a. It should be noted that the paradise mentioned here is called a *parable*, as also in 47:15. The reason is, as a saying of the Holy Prophet makes clear, that the blessings of paradise are such as no eye has seen, nor has ear heard, nor has it entered into the heart of a human to conceive of them (Bukhârî 59:8). Therefore, humans cannot know what it actually is, until he or she has tasted of its blessings. The description given in the Qur’ân being only a likeness of what it actually is, for an impression of a thing which is of a nature entirely different from the things of this world can only be conveyed by parables.

35b. The word *zill* has other meanings besides *shade*. It signifies *mightiness*, *inaccessibility*, *ease*, or *plenty*, (R). It also signifies *protection* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

36 And those to whom We have given the Book^a rejoice in that which has been revealed to thee, and of the confederates are some who deny a part of it. Say, ‘I am commanded only to serve Allâh and not associate anything with Him. To Him do I invite (you), and to Him is my return.

37 And thus have We revealed it, a true judgment, in Arabic. And if you follow their low desires after that which has come to you of knowledge, you would have against Allâh neither guardian nor protector.

SECTION 6: Steady Progress of Truth

38 And certainly We sent messengers before you (Muḥammad) and appointed for them wives and children. And it is not in (the power of) a messenger to bring a sign except by Allâh’s permission. For every term there is an appointment.^a

39 Allâh effaces what He pleases and establishes (what He pleases),^a and with Him is the basis of the Book.^b

36a. By the *Book* is meant the *Qur'ân*, as the context clearly shows. Some, however, take the Book to signify the previous revelation given to the Isrâ'îlite prophets, and understand Jewish or Christian converts to Islâm to be meant here.

38a. The significance is that the *sign* so often demanded will come at the appointed time. The ultimate discomfiture of the power of the opponents had been prophesied in the earliest revelations, hence the repeated demands.

39a. Allâh was now going to efface falsehood and to establish the Truth.

39b. The same word, *umm al-kitâb*, occurs in 3:7, where the verses that are of obvious import are called the *basis of the Book*, because allegorical verses must be interpreted subject to the principles laid down in plain words. Here the Divine ordinance to annihilate the power of the opponents of the Holy Prophet and to bring about the establishment of the Truth is called the *basis of the Book*. Because the final vanquishment of the powers of evil, which was previously foretold, would be such a clear sign that it would dispel all doubts.

40 Whether We let you see part of that which We promise them, or cause you to die, yours is but the delivery of the message, and Ours to call (them) to account.

41 See they not that We are visiting the land, curtailing it of its sides?^a And Allâh pronounces a doom — there is no repeller of His decree. And He is Swift in calling to account.

42 And those before them planned indeed, but all planning is Allâh's.^a He knows what every (*nafs*) person earns. And the disbelievers will come to know for whom is the (good) end of the Abode.

43 And those who disbelieve say: You are not a messenger. Say, 'Allâh is sufficient for a witness between you and me and whoever has knowledge of the Book.'^a

41a. *Atrâf* signifies *sides*, as indicating *the high and the low* or *exalted human being* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). The reference may be either to some of the exalted humans having come over to Islâm and the

opposition being thus weakened, or to the diminution of the number of disbelievers, both high and low, by humans daily leaving their ranks and joining the ranks of Islâm.

42a. The meaning is that the plans of the enemy need not be feared, for Allâh controls all their planning, or that the requital of their plans is in the hands of Allâh.

43a. The Book here stands for previous revelation from Allâh. And attention is called to the fact that all those who have any knowledge of previous revelation will testify to the truth of the revelation of the Qur'ân, because it fulfils all previous prophecies and satisfies the criteria of a true revelation.